

THE MOLLY MAGUIRES' DEATH PLOTS

How James McParland, the Pinkerton Man, Participated in Conspiracies Which He Was Compelled to Frustrate Secretly

"AND you mean to say that you have heard men planning to kill other men?" was the question repeated to James McParland, superintendent of the Pinkerton agency branch in Denver.

The famous detective who broke up the Molly Maguire band of Eastern Pennsylvania slowly nodded his head in reply.

"Heard them tell how, when and where they would kill a man or men?" the question was repeated.

Again the answer came in a nod of the head.

"That must have been the hard part of your work?"

"It was by all odds the hardest end of my work," replied Mr. McParland, who for the first time was giving an interview on his connection with the world famous Molly Maguire cases. "I was sent to Pennsylvania to break up this band, and the only way to get the evidence was to join the band."

"How many men were killed by the Molly Maguires in the course of their long reign of terror in Eastern Pennsylvania will never be known. Scores of innocent victims met violent deaths in various forms at the hands of this famous band of assassins."

"The planning of a murder or a series of murders was one of the coldest blooded ordeals for me to assist in that one could imagine. Think of opening with prayer a meeting conducted with the sole purpose of taking human life! A meeting where scores of men had met purely to discuss the plans of killing a fellow being! That is exactly what the Molly Maguires did time and again. They were not fired with any religious mania, either. They were deliberate murderers—their part of an arguer it was to annihilate, their only reprieve Death."

"The general rule for killing a man was to select from other districts those who were to commit the crime. I will give a detailed example of some of the meetings later on. When the men were drawn by lots or appointed by the bodymasters they had to go or be expelled from the order and to be expelled was very near certain death. Of course, a good excuse would let a man off from taking part in a murder, but it had to be a strong one. When a Molly was arrested the first thing done by the other members was to get an alibi for him and furnish him with all the funds he would need to defend himself in court."

"The failure of Jay Cooke in 1873 had had a bad effect on business. The coal trade remained good for some time, however. But along in 1874 the output of coal exceeded the demand, and the coal companies took steps to retrench. This caused the men to strike for higher pay."

"The situation in the coal districts became very tense. The Mollys were devoting their time to drinking, burning, killing and making threats. I attended two meetings, or conventions, one at Lafayette's Hall, Girardville, January 4, and one January 11 at the Town Hall, Pottsville, where plans for burning collieries and attacking mines were discussed in detail."

"Captain R. J. Linden, of the Pinkertons, arrived in the district on May 1, 1875, and he was a mighty busy man from that time on. Along in April of that year a plan had been suggested by some persons who were not Mollys to burn the Catwampus Bridge, and the idea struck the Mollys as being good, for it would cripple

the railroads. I did not have a chance to send a warning to the home office of the plot, so I struck on the idea of trying to talk the Mollys out of the plan, telling them I was sure it was a scheme on the part of the police to catch us at work. This idea had not occurred to the men, and it gave me a chance to show how loyal I was and how much I thought of their safety. I made a lot of my friends among the Mollys stancher in their friendship for me by suggesting we keep off this work."

"Were all murders planned alike?" he was asked.

"Of course, there were no two murders planned exactly alike," he answered, "but perhaps the story of Daniel Dougherty will give some idea of the lack of feeling and the cruel manner in which a murder was planned."

"On October 31, 1874, a fire occurred in Mahanoy City. In the excitement a number of fights started, and George Major, Chief Burgess of Mahanoy City, was shot and killed, while several Mollys were wounded."

"Daniel Dougherty was arrested for the murder of Major. His trial was sensational, six men declaring they had seen him fire the shot that had killed Major. Dougherty had been shot in the face during the fight, but the bullet had never been removed. His attorney was convinced that 'Dan' was not guilty of the murder, and I had been gathering evidence that seemed to show he was not guilty."

"It was a painful operation, but 'Dan's' attorney told him if he would have the bullet cut out of his face in the course of the trial he was sure it could be shown that it was of the same calibre as the one that killed Major. It had been proven that Dougherty had a different sized weapon from the one that had been used in killing Major. The operation was performed and Dougherty was acquitted."

"A company of men calling themselves the 'Modocs' had been committing a lot of crimes, and they were jealous of the reputation of the Mollys. Dougherty was a Molly, and it was the Modocs who had sworn he had fired the shot that killed Major. Later I obtained a confession from John McCann that he had committed the murder."

"The acquittal of Dougherty was the signal for a number of attempts to kill him. He was told time and again that if he did not leave the State he would be killed. He went to 'Jack' Kehoe and laid the matter before him. Kehoe wanted to know in his opinion what could be done."

"Well, if we kill W. M. Thomas and William and 'Jes' Major I guess it will have a good effect, and I won't be bothered any more," Dougherty explained. "I think you are right and I will call a meeting to discuss the plans," agreed Kehoe."

"I was asked to go to Mahanoy City to investigate the situation and report to the meeting. I found matters in a very critical state for law and order, and there was every indication that the Mollys had a fight on their hands from a rival band."

"Michael O'Brien said he did not think it would be much of a job to kill a few of the Modocs, and he thought that six men would be plenty to kill Thomas and the two Major boys. His idea was to arm the six men with shotguns and pick off the three victims as they walked the streets."

"This will save a lot of time and bother," he argued. But Kehoe thought it was a more serious affair, and as a result a convention was called to meet in Michael Clark's hotel, Mahanoy City.

"There was a big crowd present when Kehoe took the chair. He raised his hand and asked for silence and then made a short prayer."

"Is that possible, Mr. McParland?" "Impossible? So it would seem, but that is what the Mollys would do—for what reason I will not try to explain. Kehoe prayed and then opened the discussion as to the quickest and safest way to kill the three men."

since his trial. After he had told his story he was ordered to retire from the room. Kehoe asked the meeting what the members wanted to do in the matter. "Why, kill the three men, of course," a dozen voices replied, and that seemed to settle the affair to the entire satisfaction of the Mollys.

"Christopher Donnelly, treasurer of the local band, said that he would furnish two good men and would go along to see that a thorough job was done. D. F. Canning, an active Molly, also agreed to furnish men, and, it being agreed that

I would have a chance to send a warning to the men whose lives were in danger. But a second meeting was called about a week later by 'Pat' Garvey. There had been a lot of delays and the men who had talked about killing the three men had not agreed upon a plan.

"When Garvey got the delegates together, this meeting being held in the woods, he opened by saying, 'I suppose you all know the object of this meeting?' As they did, the men nodded their heads and a new discussion was launched. Thomas, one of the men reported, al-

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